

[The Experiences of a Farm Owner]

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Approximately 3,000 words SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: THE EXPERIENCES OF A FARM OWNER

Date of First Writing December 22, 1938

Name of person Interviewed Ernest B. Boney (white)

Fictitious Name None Used.

Place Blythewood, S. C.

Occupation Farmer

Name of Writer John P. Farmer

Name of Reviser State Office

It was a beautiful sunshiny day when I called on Ernest Boney. His home, about one mile north of Blythewood, is on an unpaved road leaving U. S. highway #21 some three hundred yards above the Blythewood Consolidated School and following the Southern Railway Tracks for nearly a half mile.

The driveway leading from the road to the house passes between two great oaks, standing sentinel-like. The walk to the house is hedged with stones and with flowers of some sort that had been planted in the summer and died. The front yard has swept clean, and off to

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the side of the house stands two chinaberry trees, the largest I ever saw. C. 10. S.C. Box, 2.

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The invitation to come in was immediate and cordial. The entire family was gathered around the comfortable fire in the living room. The room furnishings were in tasteful order. In position convenient to the fire, the pieces of a handsome living room suite had been arranged. In one corner stood a piano. Inquiries brought out the information that Mrs. Boney is a musician.

Mr. Boney and family at once fell in with the purpose of my visit. "The story of my life? Sure. Around here it's a tale well known, anyway."

"Yes, I was born here in Blythewood. My father was a Johnal Boney and my mother was Martha (Raines) Boney. Both of them were born and raised right here in the county. All this part of the county was in Fairfield at the time. The old home place is about two miles from Blythewood. When my mother and father died, the land was divided, and my older brother, Fletcher, lives there now.

"I was born August 2, 1890, the seventh of thirteen children, eleven boys and two girls, all of whom are still living, either here in Blythewood or in Richland County. I attended school in an old wooden building on the same spot the large brick school now stands. In those days we never had any grades higher than the seventh, so that was as far as I could go. After school we did what we could around home.

"After completing school, my father gave me a small tract of land and started me off farming for myself. As there was plenty of help in those days, none of us boys had to do much actual plowing or cotton picking. We had Negroes living on the place that were glad to get the work. All the profits of the land I farmed was given to me for my own.

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"During my school days, I always had pigs that I raised, and usually I 3 raised two or three calves for beef. All these things were a source of profits and this was the way we got what little cash money we ever had.

"My youth was spent quite pleasantly. There was plenty of hunting. This part of the county had plenty of quail, and we had them on the table all during the bird season. All of my brothers hunted, as they still do, and there was always several good bird dogs at home. We would have rabbit hunts, as the country abounded with them. In addition to the rabbit hunts, all of the younger children would have rabbit boxes set all around the farms, and we would usually have a rabbit in them every time we went to them. If we could catch them young enough, we would try to tame them. The older ones were used for the table, or sold. They would bring ten cents cash.

"The greatest sport we had was fox hunting. Everybody took part in this. I've seen the time when there was at least seventy-five fox hounds at my daddy's. During the winter season, several people that owned dogs would keep the pack together, and, as my daddy's place was centrally located, they would keep them there. We had a Negro that didn't do anything but take care of the dogs. He had to cook their food, and this was usually done in a big wash pot in the yard. I remember that the dogs were a constant source of argument between my mother and my older brothers, and daddy. They were always getting into things and disturbing my mother's chickens. There was no such thing as keeping a goat or any kind of a pet around the house while the dogs were there. They would chase them and, even in a spirit of play, were so rough that they would soon leave. We put up with them, though; people in those days thought as much of a good fox hound as they did a fine mule.

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"I never will forget the incident that 'cleared up' the dog problem. My older brother, Durham, had a big flock of sheep he was raising for the market. He had gone to the trouble of fencing off a large tract of pasture land and they were kept there. He had spent

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quite a bit of money on these sheep and they were in fine shape for a nice profit. Well, the hounds got in the habit of coming back by this pasture from a hunt and terrifying the flock, usually killing one or two of them. Durham didn't have much to say. He would go and fix up the place where they got through the fence, and then the same thing would happen all over again. This happened several times. One morning he went to see about his sheep, and he found all the places that he had fixed broken down. The dogs had gotten into the pasture again and killed over a dozen sheep. Durham didn't say a word. Every time he had mentioned it before it was a source of fun for the rest of the family, as they had warned him he couldn't make anything off the sheep. He very quietly sold the rest of the flock, in addition to his saddle horse and everything else he had that was salable. He then packed his clothes and took them to Blythewood and came back home. He got his shotgun, went out in the backyard and started shooting dogs. He killed every dog he could see. He left home immediately and went to Atlanta, where he worked for over a year before coming back home. After things quieted down a bit, daddy and the rest of the boys cooled down some, but I sure hate to think what would have happened had they found Durham right after the 'dog killing.'

"There is still plenty of fox hunting around Blythewood. Some of the boys, including my brothers, still go every chance they get. I don't go anymore. I don't have any dogs, and I never did have the 'fever' like some 5 of them did.

"I do wish they could kill the foxes out around here. They are one of the causes of the bird shortage. They also eat lots of small chickens, and they've gotten so plentiful in the last few years that they are a great nuisance.

"When I was about sixteen years old, I started clerking in my brother's store on Saturday. It was Durham's store. He had Mr. Bill Phillips running the store for him. When Mr. Phillips died, I started working regularly there. Durham didn't know anything about the store, as he had been running the saw-mill and gin. I was the only one that knew anything about the stock and books. I still did my farming, using hired help. When I worked on Saturday in

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the store, I got seventy-five cents, and when I started running the store, I worked for fifty dollars a month, which in those days was 'big money.'

“Durham had a mighty good thing of it with the store. Times were good, and we sold everything imaginable. We would have to buy fertilizer and feed by the carload. We'd take cross ties and cotton in as payment on accounts, and we had to handle all that. Most of the folks in the Blythewood section bought everything they used right there in the store. You certainly got a varied experience in a general store like that. We would even have to sell shoes to women. Goodness knows how many bolts of cloth we sold for dresses and things like that. I worked for Durham until I married.

“I had been going with Miss Beulah Wooten ever since I was big enough to go with girls, and in April, 1914, we were married. Two of my older brothers, Durham and Brookes, had married Miss Beulah's sisters, Alice and Minnie. All three were the daughters of Judge John Wooten, who died in 1905. Miss Beulah and her mother had been living with Durham since right after Judge Wooten's death. Our families had been knowing each other long before either of us were born, and we all had gone to school together. Our courtship was lengthy, as all courtships were. We went together seven years before we married. We would go on straw rides at times. There was usually entertainments, such as box suppers and things like that at the Church or schools which we always attended. I had a horse and buggy, and we didn't have much trouble getting around. All in all, we had as much fun as anyone else.

“After we married, we bought this place. It belonged to the widow of Mr. Bill Phillips, and it consisted of sixty acres. The same house was here, along with a Negro tenant house. There was a barn and lot, a large corn crib, and good stables here at the time. We had to buy the place on credit, and we paid fifty dollars an acre for the place. It was a bargain at that, the land was in good shape. And that price included the house and all the buildings. We paid for the place in five years, right off the farm. I paid six hundred dollars a year, besides living good and having the expenses of our children coming along all the time. I

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was able to make improvements from time to time, and I had to build a new barn to take care of my stock. We have always had a cow since we got married, and when we moved here I had quite a few hogs I had to make room for.

“In June, 1915, our first child, Joseph, was born. He was afflicted with a club foot at birth. We didn't know what in the world to do. Finally, Dr. Teams, our doctor, got in touch with Dr. Boyd, the bone specialist in Columbia. After making several examinations, he said he felt sure he could correct his foot so that he would be able to walk all right. After several visits to Columbia, Dr. Boyd broke the foot and put it in a cast. Joseph's 7 foot stayed that way until he was about two years old. I never will forget the day we took him to Columbia to have the cast taken off. We had to take the train. His mother and I were so afraid something would be wrong, even though the doctor had tried to console us by saying he thought everything would be all right.

“We had lost our second baby just a short time before, and I was so afraid the grief of this, added to something going wrong with Joseph's foot, would be more than his mother could stand.

“We arrived at Dr. Boyd's office sometime around noon. He saw us immediately. After some examination he took Joseph in and removed the cast. He said his foot was going to be all right, but it looked so bad after being in a cast so long we could hardly believe him. There was such a long time before we could be sure. We had to massage his foot and legs for months, all the time wondering if he was ever going to be able to walk. Our joy was unbounded when he finally took his first step. We still had to bandage his foot, and he was very slow in learning to walk. There was a long time before his foot was right. He had to wear a special built high shoe until he was quite a big boy, but now there is no difference in his feet. We have always looked upon Dr. Boyd as a worker of miracles.

“All of this was a big expense to me; and then in 1918, Ernest Jr., was born. Then came Ben, all of whom have finished high school.

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"Our next child died at birth, and in 1923, our first girl, Mildred Ann was born. She is in high school now. Next came Layda, then Bobby, the baby. Both are in school. We have six living children, and thank God, they are all well and healthy.

"In 1922, I went into the general merchandise business in Blythewood.

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Durham had closed his store right after I left him, due to other interests. I did right well for two years. In 1924, I lost everything I had in the store, by fire. There was no insurance. Rates were so high out here in the country without any fire protection that I had never taken out any. I had gone in debt right deep to get the store started, and it took several years to get over the loss. I have never completely recovered from it.

"I have always been able to keep from mortgaging my home. As long as I can do this, I feel like I can feed and clothe my family. There has been plenty of times when we thought we just couldn't keep from it. Just this past fall, my third son, Ben, entered Clemson. He knew I couldn't help him out much, so he had been working for the past two summers, saving his money so he could enter. He just couldn't seem to get enough to get by the first year. Finally, he got some help from the National Youth Administration. But the expense of the freshman year is so large he had to borrow some extra money to carry him on through. He certainly has his mind set on finishing college. He is taking agriculture, and he wants to teach when he finishes. I wish I were able to send all my children on through college, but it is impossible. I have been able to let them finish high school and I am very thankful for that.

"I had a bad crop this year. I planted my entire cotton allotment, and in August, it looked like I was going to have a bale to the acre. It rained a good deal and the boll weevil ruined me. It's gotten to the place where it looks like it's impossible to kill the weevil. I sprayed my cotton as often as possible, but it still didn't do any good. I would have been better off if I hadn't planted a row. I averaged 236 pounds of seed 9 cotton to the acre, when I should

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have gotten a bale of ginned cotton. Oh, well! I reckon everything is for the best. I hear the government has more cotton on hand than they know what to do with. If everybody had made a big crop this year, the price would go down, and cotton is sure cheap enough as it is. I made more cash money on what I didn't plant than I got out of what I did plant.

"Oh, yes sir? I certainly am in favor of Government Control. I'll tell you, we would be in a bad fix by now if we didn't have a control of some sort. The trouble is, people won't give it a trial. They just sit down and start kicking, just to have something to kick about. It makes it hard on people who are trying to abide by the rules. It's just like the relief in Blythewood. It's a fine thing for them that actually need it. What ruins it is that so many people who don't need it abuse it. For a time last summer, you couldn't get a Negro to work on the farm. They would get two or three days work on the W.P.A., and this was all they needed. It isn't just the niggers either. There are lots of white people around here who have farms but won't work them. With all the land around Blythewood that's lying idle, there could be plenty for all, but they won't work them as long as they can get work on the W.P.A. They won't even raise a garden at home.

"Yes, we have plenty of churches around here. My entire family are members of old Sandy-Level Baptist Church, the church we have attended all our lives. My wife's parents and my parents are buried there. All my family are regular church members. There are several churches in the community. Old Asbury Methodist Church has been here as long as I can remember. People don't seem to go to church nowadays like they use to. When I was a boy, it 10 seemed that everybody went to church on Sunday. Everything seems to have changed since then.

"My life has been one of hard work. I have always been able to get enough to keep my family reasonably comfortable. If I can keep my health, I know I can provide for them in the fashion we have always lived. I want them to get all the education possible. They are

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all good, honest, and hardworking. And as long as they stay that way, I won't think our hardships have been in vain.”